



# The Wedding Gift

Marlen Suyapa Bodden

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## READING GROUP GUIDE

### About the book:

When prestigious plantation owner Cornelius Allen gives his daughter Clarissa's hand in marriage, she takes with her a gift: Sarah—her slave and her half-sister. Raised by an educated mother, Clarissa is not a proper southern belle she appears to be with ambitions of loving who she chooses and Sarah equally hides behind the façade of being a docile house slave as she plots to escape. Both women bring these tumultuous secrets and desires with them to their new home, igniting events that spiral into a tale beyond what you ever imagined possible and it will leave you enraptured until the very end.

Told through alternating viewpoints of Sarah and Theodora Allen, Cornelius' wife, Marlen Suyapa Bodden's *The Wedding Gift* is an intimate portrait that will leave readers breathless.

## Discussion Questions

1. List the main themes of *The Wedding Gift*. What was the point that Marlen tried to make with each theme?
2. Even though the characters lived in a radically different time, with which, if any, of their predicaments could you relate?
3. How does Sarah Campbell change or evolve? What events triggered these changes?
4. How does Theodora Allen change or evolve? What events triggered these changes?
5. List any parts of *The Wedding Gift* that made you uncomfortable. Why? Did this discomfort lead to a new understanding of some aspect of your life you might not have thought of previously?



6. What, if any, parts of *The Wedding Gift* were too violent? Could Marlen have made her points without such level of detail?
7. Were any parts of *The Wedding Gift* not credible? Why?
8. What were the clues that Marlen planted relating to the ending? Were the clues not obvious enough? Should Marlen have revealed the ending earlier?
9. Using concrete examples, describe the main reasons why planters and legislatures in the slaveowning states enacted laws making it a crime to teach slaves how to read and write.
10. When was the international slave trade abolished? What effect did that have on slave owners?
11. What did some slave owners and traders do to get around the international ban on importing slaves?
12. What were the slave owners' two main tools for controlling slaves and preventing them from fleeing?
13. Using examples from *The Wedding Gift*, state the ways slaves were hunted and recaptured when they escaped. What was the government's role in helping to capture escaped slaves?
14. Sarah Campbell fled from slavery because she wanted to be free, but what were the immediate reasons?
15. What were Theodora Allen's goals? Which, if any, did she accomplish?
16. One of the themes in *The Wedding Gift* was the relationship between mother and daughter. Separately describe the relationships between Sarah and Emmeline and Theodora and Clarissa.
17. Even though most slaves were illiterate, they passed knowledge from one generation to the next by telling stories. Emmeline, for example, tells Sarah a folktale about a woman named Lela. What did Emmeline teach Sarah by telling her that story?
18. Citing specific examples from *The Wedding Gift*, state how Theodora and Emmeline showed their daughters that they loved them.
19. How did medical care differ between women slaves and slaveowning women? Which was better, and why?
20. State why spirituality was important to slaves.
21. What aspects of Sarah's personality, if any, do you admire, and why? What do you not like about her, and why?



22. What aspects of Theodorah's personality, if any, do you admire, and why? What do you not like about her, and why?
23. In what way were Sarah, Clarissa, and Isaac related?
24. Citing specific examples from The Wedding Gift, how did planters control their wives and daughters?
25. State specific examples of how slaveowners showed slaves that their masters had control over every aspect of their lives.
26. What was the document that Cornelius Allen was drafting just before Sarah murdered him? What happened to that document?
27. Why did Cornelius Allen let Clarissa's son live? Why did he not sell him into slavery?
28. How were New York City businessmen involved in slavery in the 19th century?
29. 2011 was the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War. Why was the Civil War one of the most important events in the history of the United States and the world?
30. What is the effect of having an unpaid labor force on the development of an economy?
31. What do you think was the most memorable passage in The Wedding Gift, and why?
32. Sarah Campbell: villain or vixen? Why?

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